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CSUH may consider new name Officials to determine

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HAYWARD -- What's in a name?

A great deal, especially for those in Cal State Hayward's marketing department. The campus that sits atop Carlos Bee Boulevard, overlooking the Bay Area, has everything students seek. The problem, however, is that few realize it. Which brings us to the university's name.

Looking to improve its image and gain a competitive edge in drawing younger students and, more importantly, private dollars to offset dwindling state funding, officials at the 15,000-student university are investigating whether a name change is in order. The process is in its early stages, and no one is sure what the eventual outcome will be. "We're trying to establish what we are today," said Bob Brauer, the assistant to the president. "It comes as part of a process that didn't start having any notions like this. We're not on people's minds. One thing we've found here, we have Cal, Stanford and then we have the two senior institutions (San Francisco State and San Jose State). "How do we get the message out to the people about the programs we have here? We've got to get a program that lets people know what this place is. We've got to develop an image."

And part of developing the school's image is a potential name change, which wouldn't be a first for the 342-acre campus. The school, which also has a campus in Concord, has modified its moniker four times during its 45-year history. Each change was made to elevate the school's image and enhance its identity.

Jay Colombatto, Cal State Hayward's director of marketing and communications, has just started investigating whether a name change is warranted. "It's not a simple consideration," he said.

Colombatto said the university's Integrated Marketing Committee, which is working on an overall marketing strategy for the campus, suggested earlier this year that the school consider changing its name - and Colombatto has been studying the proposition for the better part of the past six months.

Thus far, Colombatto has met with a number of focus groups in an attempt to discern the potential impact a name change would have. Colombatto said he expects to meet with alumni, faculty members, students and potential donors in the coming months.

"At this point, I think we have more questions than we have answers," Colombatto acknowledged. "That's what this process is all about, to try to get more clarity. It's very early in the discussion stage.

"I think a name change could have tremendous impact on growth."

There are three major reasons for exploring the name change:

- Cal State Hayward, which has one of the highest percentages of upper-division and graduate students in the CSU system, would like to lure more freshmen. Some believe changing the name and designing a more aggressive marketing plan would make the school more attractive to high school seniors looking for a four-year college.

- As a commuter campus that's isolated in the Hayward hills, the school is not viewed as a viable option for the two-county area it services. "The objective," Colombatto said, "is to be viewed as the public university of choice for students in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. We want to be known as a university that offers an achievable degree."

- Because of the state's ongoing budget crisis, schools in the CSU system must secure private funds for their operating budgets and campus expansion plans. A name that's more reflective of the region, some believe, could create greater awareness of the campus and, perhaps, generate interest from private donors.

"We have a problem with donor recognition," Colombatto said. "We'd look for a name and an identity that communicates our relevance to the East Bay."

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